DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 200 104 HE 013 570

AUTHOR Becker, Heather Anne; And Others
TITLE Job Hunting Behaviors and Employment Status of Recent College Graduates.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Education; Career Ladders; *Careers; *College Graduates; *Education Work Relationship; *Employment Level; Employment Potential; Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; Institutional Research; *Job Search Methods; *Liberal Arts; Occupational Mobility; Sciences; Vocational Followup
IDENTIFIERS *University of Texas Austin

ABSTRACT

The self-reported employment status, job-hunting behaviors, and career potential of current jobs for liberal arts/natural sciences graduates and nonliberal arts/sciences graduates at the University of Texas at Austin were studied approximately six months to one year after graduation. Sixty percent (151 persons, representing a 21 percent return rate) of those currently employed indicated that their current jobs have at least possible career potential. There was no statistically significant difference in self-ratings of career portential between liberal arts/natural sciences and nonliberal arts/natural sciences graduates (predominately business and communications graduates). The unemployment rate (5 percent) was identical for liberal arts/natural sciences graduates and nonliberal arts/natural sciences graduates. Although liberal arts/natural sciences graduates were somewhat more likely to be in graduate school or looking for another job than were graduates from other majors surveyed, this difference was not statistically significant. Those graduates who utilized personal contacts, direct application, and college recruiters to acquire their jobs were significantly more likely to report that their jobs have career potential, that their jobs are similar to pregraduation plans, and that they plan to stay in the same job next year than were those who utilized other job-hunting methods (classified ads, employment agencies, and job boards). (Author/SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED200104

HE

Job Hunting Behaviors and Employment Status of Recent College Graduates

Heather Anne Becker, Counselor

Susan Arnold Lange, Counselor

Career Choice Information Center

University of Texas, Austin

Austin, Texas

Janet Lenz, Assistant Director

Career Planning and Placement

University of North Carolina

Greensboro, North Carolina

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Heather Anne Becker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

HE 013 570

This survey investigated the self-reported job-hunting behaviors, current employment status, and perceived career potential for both liberal arts/natural sciences and nonliberal arts/natural sciences graduates.

The authors wish to thank Dr. Gary Hanson, Office of the Dean of Students, Dr. Susan Hereford and her staff, Measurement and Evaluation Center, and the staff of the Career Choice Information Center, University of Texas for their valuable assistance.

Abstract

This study investigated the self-reported employment status, job-hunting behaviors, and career potential of current jobs for liberal arts and natural sciences and non-liberal arts and sciences graduates approximately six months to one year after graduation. Sixty percent of those currently employed indicated that their current jobs have at least possible career potential. There was no statistically significant difference in self-ratings of career potential between liberal arts/natural sciences and non-liberal arts/natural sciences graduates (predominately Business and Communications graduates). The unemployment rate (5%) was identical for liberal arts/natural sciences graduates and non-liberal arts/natural sciences graduates. Although liberal arts/natural sciences graduates were somewhat more likely to be in graduate school or looking for another job than were graduates from other majors surveyed, this difference was not statistically significant. Those graduates who utilized personal contacts, direct application and college recruiters to acquire their jobs were significantly more likely to report that their jobs have career potential, that their jobs are similar to pre-graduation plans, and that they plan to stay in the same job next year than were those who utilized other job -hunting methods (classified ads, employment agencies, job boards).

Increasing interest has been focused upon the employment status of college graduates, not only because of the tight job market in the 70's, but also because of increased awareness of college students as consumers. Despite frequent requests from college students (and their parents) for information about how previous graduates have fared in the job market, few academic institutions systematically make this information available to these consumers (Walsh, 1977). What information is available about employment status is also difficult to interpret because of the different ways the outcomes are operationalized. Criteria used for defining successful job-hunting include starting salaries, apparent relationship between college major and first job title, etc. John Munschauer, Director of Career Development Services at Cornell University, has pointed out (Chronicle of Higher Education, January 7, 1980) that most studies concerned with employment status of alumni define outcome according to which graduates got jobs through college recruiters. Such studies may provide a distorted picture of employment for liberal arts students, most of whom do not find their jobs via campus recruiters.

Similarly, although the literature and training on recommended job-hunting strategies have increased prodigiously (Bolles, 1977), data concerning how college graduates actually find their jobs are seriously lacking. Counselors are, therefore, operating without outcome studies which measure the effectiveness of their recommendations to job-hunting students.

The lack of information about employment status and job-hunting methods is unfortunate because, as Cappeto (1977) points out, students -- and in particular, liberal arts students whose career options may not be apparent to them -- need accurate data about the employment experiences of alumni from their campuses.

In the absence of this information, students rely upon hearsay, frequently based upon limited exposure to graduating seniors; similarly, faculty and placement office staff rely upon impressionistic data usually based upon the numbers of pregraduation students who receive offers through their offices. Since Cappeto reported that unemployment drops from 49% at graduation to 7% five months later, outlook based upon employment status at graduation may be unduly pessimistic. This is especially consequential for liberal arts graduates who Cappeto reports are less likely than, for example, business graduates to receive offers before graduation.

The current study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the employment status of University of Texas-Austin alumni, approximately six to twelve months after graduation?
2. How does the employment status of former liberal arts students compare to that of former non-liberal arts students?
3. How do college graduates job-hunt?
4. What distinguishes successful job-hunters, i.e., graduates who report that their current position has career potential and that they plan to remain in it for at least another year, from graduates who consider their job only temporary or are currently job-hunting either because they are unemployed or because they are dissatisfied with their current job?

Method

Overview. To answer these questions, we surveyed by mail all students who had registered to use Liberal Arts and Sciences Placement (LASP) services the previous year and were eligible to graduate in the interim (N=430). Although the majority of these graduates were former liberal arts and natural sciences

majors, the sample included some other majors also. An additional 295 liberal arts and natural sciences graduates (who had not registered to use LASP) were also mailed this survey. The 41-item survey, which was designed by the Career Center staff, solicited information concerning: current employment status, job's career potential, job-hunting behaviors, job-acquiring methods, pre-graduation plans, and future vocational plans. The open-ended responses to items concerning pre-graduation and future vocational plans were coded by the Career Center staff to reflect congruence/lack of congruence with current employment status.

One hundred fifty-one usable surveys (21%) were returned. The low response rate may be due in part to the fact that surveys were mailed to permanent addresses given when students had last registered (usually parents' addresses); many students probably did not receive the mailed questionnaire.

Description of Sample. Seventy-four percent of the sample were liberal arts and natural sciences students (LANS). The remaining 26% were primarily Communication and Business Colleges graduates. Forty-two majors were represented in the sample, with the largest groups of students having majors in psychology, computer science, journalism, economics, mathematics, and government. The mean age was 24 years; 52% of the sample were female; 48% were male. Eighty-eight percent of the sample were surveyed six to twelve months after graduation.

Results and Discussion.

Employment Status. Despite grim forecasts in the popular literature, the graduates in this sample (including liberal arts and natural sciences alumni) are not suffering from massive unemployment. Only 5% of the sample reported that they were unemployed and job-hunting (see Table 1). This is very similar to

Insert Table 1 here

Cappeto's report of 7% unemployment six months after graduation. It should be remembered, however, that the present sample may be biased toward those who are satisfied with their current employment status. The response rate was relatively low for this survey (21%) and those who were unemployed or in undesired jobs may not have returned this survey.

Approximately one-fourth of the total sample were currently attending graduate school. Although a slightly higher percentage of the liberal arts/natural sciences alumni were employed and looking for another job or were attending graduate school, this difference was not statistically significant. Of particular interest is the finding that liberal arts and sciences students were not more likely to be unemployed than non-liberal arts and sciences students, at least in this sample. Among the employed subsample, approximately three-fourths were in jobs which they indicated have either possible or definite career potential. Again, this is quite similar to Cappeto's results. Although the majority of respondents to this item indicated that their jobs have definite career potential, it should be noted that those least satisfied with their current job may be actively job-hunting, and therefore were not asked to respond to this item. When responses to this question and the question concerning employment status are considered together, approximately 60% of those not in graduate school believed their jobs have possible or definite career potential. The remaining respondents were looking for a better job (either actively or passively) or were unemployed.

Job-Hunting Behaviors. Table 2 presents a comparison of the self-reported job-hunting behaviors (previous behaviors for those respondents who were not currently job-hunting and ongoing behaviors for those who were in the process of job-hunting) for five employment status groups:

1. currently employed in a job with definite career potential
2. currently employed in a job with possible career potential
3. currently employed in a job considered only temporary, until something better comes along
4. currently employed and actively looking for another position
5. currently unemployed and job-hunting

Insert Table 2 about here

In all analyses of job-hunting behavior those enrolled in graduate school at least half time were eliminated.

There were some interesting differences in reported job-hunting behavior by employment status. For example, those employed in jobs with definite career potential had more interviews and received more offers than the other groups. Those who considered their jobs only temporary had spent less time job-hunting than all other groups and had circulated fewer resumes. Those currently job-hunting averaged more contact with employers, but had fewer interviews or offers than those currently employed, particularly those whose jobs have career potential. A closer examination of the number of contacts for the employed job-hunters category revealed that two individuals in this group reported contacting 50 or more employers; thus, the average for this group was skewed. When these two individuals were eliminated from the group, the average number of contacts for employed job-hunters drops to 4.92, the lowest average for any of the five employment status groups.

If successful job-hunters are defined as those who perceive their jobs as

having at least possible career potential, then it appears that successful job-hunters may not spend more time job-hunting, but apparently use that time to better advantage than do unsuccessful job-hunters. The fact that successful job-hunters made fewer contacts with employers but had more interviews and offers suggests that it may not be the number of contacts but the quality (e.g., appropriateness) of those contacts which is important. Those who consider their jobs only temporary appear to have invested the least in the job-hunting process; they spent less time job-hunting and circulated fewest number of resumes, although their number of employer contacts was similar to that of successful job-hunters.

There were also differences between the employed and the unemployed job-hunters. Unemployed job-hunters were less likely to have a career objective, and this may contribute substantially to their difficulties in job-hunting. They also appeared to use traditional job-hunting methods more frequently: answered more classified ads, completed more applications, used job boards more frequently. The unemployed job-hunters have also interviewed with more campus recruiters than the employed job-hunters. This finding seems somewhat contradictory, since utilizing campus recruiters was a viable job-hunting method for many students who believe their jobs to have career potential. However, a quick perusal of the unemployed graduates' responses indicated that those students who used campus recruiters wanted local positions. Since most college recruiters represent large national corporations (usually not located locally), interviewing with college recruiters is not usually an effective way to find a local position.

Job Acquiring Methods. Those respondents who were currently employed and not job-hunting were asked how they had acquired their present job. The

largest percentage (34%) had found their job through personal contacts. Twenty-four percent cited direct application to employers and 16% cited college recruiters. (This category drops to 10% when computer science students were eliminated.) The remaining 26% located their job through other job-acquiring methods, such as employment agencies, job listings or combinations thereof. We also looked at the relationship between job-acquiring methods and self-reported career potential of current job for respondents who were employed and not job-hunting. Those respondents who utilized personal contacts, direct application and college recruiters to acquire their jobs were significantly more likely to report that their jobs have career potential than those who utilized the other, more traditional job-acquiring methods (chi square = 25.09, $p < .05$).

This finding is reinforced by responses to questions concerning the sample's pre-graduation and future plans. Those who reported that their present job was similar to what they wanted pre-graduation and those who expect to stay in the same field in the future (although with more responsibility or perhaps a different setting) tended to use direct application, personal contacts or college recruiters. In contrast, those who utilized the other job-acquiring methods were more likely to have planned to enter different fields pre-graduation (or had no plans) and intend to change fields next year (chi square = 44.34, $p < .01$; 51.18, $p < .001$, respectively). Only 7% of those who used personal contacts, direct application or recruiters planned to change career fields next year, while 25% of those using other job-acquiring methods intended to find a job in a different field. These results support Granovetter's finding (1974) that those who got their job through personal contacts were less likely to be looking for another job.

Implications. This study examines how graduates, particularly liberal arts and natural sciences graduates, job-hunt. This information is especially useful

to counselors as they communicate with students about what to expect in job-hunting. For example, informing students that the average graduate job hunts for approximately two to three months may alert them to begin this process well before graduation. Perhaps more important, however, is what these results suggest about various job-hunting strategies for various subgroups of job-hunters.

These results indicate that finding a position through interviewing with college recruiters was an effective job-hunting technique for some students. However, the fact that half the students in computer science found their jobs this way while only 10% of the remaining students got their jobs through recruiters suggests that the viability of this method may be limited to students with certain, usually technical, backgrounds. Therefore, the importance of continuing to bring recruiters to campus may be dependent on the kind of students served by the placement office and should be so advertised to the campus community.

As mentioned in the introduction, follow-up studies differ in the criteria they use to measure employment outcome. This study has focused on employment status and respondents' perceived career potential. However, since information about number of offers is available, the relationship between offers and job-hunting behaviour can also be examined.

Those who consider their jobs to have career potential reported more job offers than those who consider their jobs only temporary or those presently job-hunting. Also, those whose jobs were similar to their pre-graduation plans and those who plan to stay in the same kind of work in the future (although perhaps in a different setting, with more responsibility) reported

more job offers. However, there was no significant relationship between number of offers and job-acquiring method. In other words, those who used traditional job-hunting methods do not appear to have more difficulty getting job offers -- instead, the difference between them and those individuals who use non-traditional methods is apparent in the degree of career potential they report.

This finding suggests that the job-hunting strategy recommended to students should depend on the student and his/her job-hunting goals. Those students with vague career goals and few technical (vocationally-oriented) skills may be well advised to use any method to find a job, but plan on its being temporary -- an opportunity to clarify career goals and begin developing the necessary skills and experience to meet that career goal. Viewed in this light, the first job may serve as an apprenticeship. On the other hand, those students with clear career coals backed up with relevant skills/experiences should be encouraged to utilize specialized methods so they can maximize the chance of working in a job which they believe has career potential.

Because this is a descriptive study, it cannot be assumed that using certain job-hunting techniques causes certain outcomes -- it may be, for example, that those who utilize certain job-hunting methods are also those best qualified for the positions. Nevertheless, the results of this study suggest a potential relationship between job-hunting philosophy espoused by Bolles and others that the successful job-hunter should determine a career objective and then begin initiating contact with prospective employers, preferably through a network of personal contacts.

Table 1 Employment Status of Respondents

(N=151)

Employment Status	LANS Students		Non-LANS		Total Sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Employed and not job-hunting	59	53	27	69	86	57
Employed and job-hunting	13	12	3	8	16	10
Unemployed and job-hunting	6	5	2	5	8	5
Unemployed and not job-hunting	2	2	-	-	2	1
Attending Graduate School	31	28	7	18	38	25
Other/blank	1	1	-	-	1	1
Total	112		39		151	

Table 2 Job Hunting Behaviors for Five Employment Status Groups

	Employed With Definite Potential (N=52)		Employed With Possible Potential (N=14)		Employed, But Job Temporary (N=12)		Employed & Job Hunting (N=15)		Unemployed & Job-Hunting (N=8)	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Length in Weeks	8.75	9.88	14.00	25.01	6.25	5.51	13.53	13.65	14.88	9.22
Resumes Distributed	11.67	17.58	16.14	21.59	6.83	8.63	14.60	30.02	7.88	9.33
Employer Contact	7.35	7.24	5.64	8.12	7.17	9.55	14.20	26.70	9.00	9.06
Interviews[a]	7.90	6.41	5.50	4.22	4.42	4.27	4.00	7.65	3.88	3.36
Offers[b]	2.85	2.07	2.00	1.24	1.75	1.22	1.13	1.64	1.38	2.77
Career Objectives[a,c]							1.21	.43	1.63	.52
Written Resume[c]							1.07	.27	1.13	.35
Personal Contacts							3.14	5.23	4.88	7.02
Classified Ads							2.36	5.17	6.63	10.36
Job Boards							1.21	1.48	2.13	1.89
Employment Agencies							.93	1.64	.75	1.04
College Recruiters[a]							.57	1.65	2.88	3.56
Applications Completed[a]							6.00	7.36	13.63	13.06

a - Differences among groups significant at $p < .10$

b - Differences among groups significant at $p < .05$

c - Yes=1 No=2

References

Bolles, Richard N. What Color Is Your Parachute? Ten Speed Press: Berkeley, California, 1978.

Cappeto, Michael A. Liberal Arts vs business administration, Journal of College Placement, 1978. 37-39.

Granovetter, Mark S. Getting A Job. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard Press, 1974.

Irish, Richard K. Go Hire Yourself An Employer, New York, Anchor Press, 1972.

Munchauer, John, as sited in Myers, C. Chronicle of Higher Education, January 7, 1980.

Walsh, E. Michael. "No Frills Follow-Up": A cookbook approach for small colleges, Journal of College Placement, 1977, 37: 46-50.